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# Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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# Syrian Arab Republic: ongoing human rights violations in Afrin and the persecution of the Druze minority

Our human rights organization appealed to the international community in June 2018 with a request to approach the Turkish Government to end the massive human rights violations in the region of Afrin. The predominantly Kurdish province in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic has been occupied by the Turkish army since 18th March, 2018.

The Kurdish population in Afrin is being oppressed under Turkish occupation. All Kurdish signs and scriptures were removed and Kurdish classes in schools will not continue after the summer break. According to our sources, Kurdish activists reported more than 120 kidnappings, seven murders, ten robberies und 27 raids, between the 1st and the 15th of July 2018. The raids left behind destroyed property. Four fields burned down during that time. The Turkish Army has kidnapped (and probably arrested) at least 3,000 Kurds since the conquest of the Kurdish province on 18th March. Many affected families want to stay anonymous because they are terrified about reprisals. Turkish soldiers and their allies keep confiscating mobile phones from civilians in order to control if anyone is reporting the attacks. Furthermore, the Turkish Military has already transferred 10,000 radical Arab Islamists to the Kurdish province. Many of the new settlers are armed and belong to different Islamist groups. They support the Turkish occupation and are murdering, torturing and looting the Kurdish civilians under the eyes of the Turkish army. Women without headscarves no longer dare to walk on the streets. Due to the Islamization of the region, the Alevi and Yezidi minorities are not able to practice their beliefs in Afrin anymore. The small Christian church, with approximately 1,000 members, has disappeared. Society for threatened People continues to demand a complete withdrawal of Turkish troops from Afrin and the restoration of autonomous status within the Syrian Arab Republic.

### Protection of the Syrian Druze

On the 25th of July, 2018, radical Sunni fighters from the so-called "Islamic State" (ISIS) attacked peaceful Druze villages in the East of the southern Syrian province As-Suwaida. These attacks killed at least 255 civilians, injured more than 200; 35 mostly young women were kidnapped. ISIS fighters followed the same pattern as they did against Kurdish Yezidis and Muslims in northwestern Iraqi Sinjar in August 2014 or in northern Syrian Kobane in June 2015. They came during the night pretending to be regular neighbors, and when the inhabitants opened the doors, the Islamists took knives and massacred their victims. At the end of July 2018, ISIS published pictures of 14 frightened young girls and women in their custody, demanding that either the army of the Arab Republic cease its offensive against the "Syrian revolutionaries" in the Yarmuk Valley or "harm would be done" to the Druze hostages. The pictures show the hostages against the background of the black and white flag of ISIS.

### ISIS takes a cruel "revenge" on Druze

ISIS justified its attacks on As-Suwaida with an offensive by the army of the Syrian Arab Republic against an ISIS enclave in southern Syria. Some Druze accuse the government in Damascus of not sufficiently protecting them. According to them, lack of protection is supposed to be Damascus' revenge for the refusal of many Druze to serve in the Syrian military. They also accuse the Syrian government of transferring ISIS fighters to the Syrian desert in May 2018 after abandoning their fortress in Yarmouk near Damascus. Other Druze suspect the Syrian Islamists, supported by the United States of America (USA), to cooperate with ISIS. The Syrian Islamist rebels were stationed about 100 Kilometers to the East, in the desert near the U.S.-led Tanf base on the border with Jordan. The various conspiracy theories about the ISIS attack on As-Suwaida have led to resentment among the Druze. The fact remains that the Druze need better protection against the Sunni Islamists. The Government of Syrian Arab Republic, the USA, Israel and Jordan are requested to do more for an effective protection of this peaceful minority.

### Outrage among the Druze worldwide

The brutal attacks by the Islamists on the Druze minority in Syria has caused outrage among the Druze in Syria, Lebanon and above all in Israel. Thousands of Druze people gathered in Israel's Galilee region and the Israel-occupied Golan Heights at the end of July 2018 to protest against the massacre of their fellow believers in the Syrian Arab Republic. It was discussed how the Druze in Israel could support the Druze within the Syrian Arab Republic.

The international community should react urgently and protect the Druze in the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community's lack of action, especially on the part of the governments in Israel, Lebanon and Jordan, could destabilize these three neighboring countries. Although the Druze are among the smaller minorities in these countries, they are established and well-organized communities. They will no longer stay passive as their coreligionists are under attack.

Three years ago, on June 22, 2015, about 100 Druze people stopped an Israeli ambulance "Magen David Adom" on its way to the hospital and beat a wounded Syrian to death. With this brutal lynching operation, the Druze wanted to express their anger against the policy of the Israeli government. The Druze living on the Israel -occupied Golan Heights and those within Israel have a problem with Israel's treatment of Syrian wounded in Israel's hospitals. In the opinion of the Druze these wounded are not ordinary Syrian citizens, but Syrian Islamist rebels who want to destroy not only the Syrian army, but also their fellow Druze in the Syrian Arab Republic. For this reason, the Israeli security forces have drastically increased surveillance of the wounded Syrians treated in the Israeli hospitals. Following these incidents, there were intensive talks between the Israeli Government and representatives of the Druze community in Israel. The presumption is that Israel used its communication channels with the Syrian Sunni Islamists to stop the attacks on Druze. In fact, hardly any attacks on the Druze been reported on the Syrian side afterwards.

The City As-Suwaida (or Suweida) has about 170,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the province as-Suwaida in the southwest of Syria, located about 100 kilometers from Damascus. The region is the settlement center of the Syrian Druze and is located at an altitude of about 1,080 meters in the Hauran region on the Western edge of the Dschebel ad-Duruz (Druze Mountains). The name "Druze Mountains" has been arabized in 1937 and transformed into "Arab Mountains". The important small towns of the province are Shahba (15 kilometers from As-Suwaida, the ancient Philippopolis) and the Roman foundation Schaqqa (25 kilometers from As-Suwaida). As-Suwaida borders with the Syrian provinces of Daraa and Damascus and the state of Jordan. The Druze are located worldwide in different countries: in Syria there are 300,000 - 700,000 Druze, about 280,000 in Lebanon and a very small number in Jordan. The Druze have been victims of persecution since the formation of their religious community around the year 1010, mainly on the hands of radical Sunnis. Their religion has Islamic roots, but many Sunnis do not consider them to be Muslims. Soul migration - the belief that a person's soul immediately migrates into a newborn after death - is an example of ideas in the Druze religion that are incompatible with Islam. Despite common roots, Druze are labelled "apostates" by radical Muslims. The Druze religion therefore developed into a "secret religion" whose rites are known only to members. Due to persecution, the Druze live a reclusive life in mountainous regions that are difficult to access, such as the Druze Mountains or the Chouf Mountains in Lebanon.

According to our information, a massacre of Druze in the mountain region of Simaq in the province of Idlib in the Northwest of the Syrian Arab Republic occurred at the beginning of June 2015. About 20 Druze been killed by members of the extremist "al-Nusra" front and allied Islamist groups. In this region are 17 Druze settlements with up to 30,000 inhabitants. On 4th of September 2015, the Druze dignitary Sheikh Wahid al-Balous and 26 other people died during two bomb attacks in the city of as-Suwayda.

Society for Threatened People calls on the Human Rights Council to demand that:

1. The international community, especially the governments in the Syrian Arab Republic, Russia, Iran, Israel, the United States and Jordan, do everything in their power to free the abducted Druze men and women from ISIS. Together with the active participation of the Druze, the province of As-Suwaida and its Druze population must given better protection.
2. The Druze are recognized as a religious community in the Syrian Arab Republic.
3. More autonomy is given to the province of As-Suwaida.
4. All Druze prisoners are released from Syrian prisons.
5. The Druze be included in the talks on the future of the Syrian Arab Republic.